Communication Action Plan for Veterinary Accreditation Safeguarding Issue (updated 6/21/04)

Issue Group: Veterinary Accreditation

Specific Activity Area being Addressed by this Action Plan: Communication

Recommendations Covered:
#101: Strengthen the federal system of accreditation for veterinarians…..including a requirement for reporting and use of international animal health information.
145: Redesign and upgrade the national veterinary accreditation program to include
--periodic communication with all accredited veterinarians to emphasize their important role in certification of animal movement, reporting, and response to unusual animal diseases or conditions
#146: Continue development of two levels of accreditation ……Make paramount the emphasis on FAD diagnosis, containment, reporting, and response with state and federal agencies…

Added Recommendation:
VA3: Provide greater outreach to accredited veterinarians through dissemination of information using several media. Assure that information about the new Veterinary Accreditation Program is readily available. Improved outreach should include veterinary colleges, veterinary practitioners, state departments of agriculture, American Veterinary Medical Association, producer organizations, and State Licensing Boards.

Issue Group Findings: Veterinarians, colleges of veterinary medicine and state departments of agriculture must be informed about the proposed changes underway for the Veterinary Accreditation Program so that they will be prepared when the new rule is out for public comment. Vehicles for disseminating information must be developed so that all groups are reached.

Following the implementation of the new Veterinary Accreditation Program, it will be critical to the success of the Program that there are mechanisms for regular communication with accredited veterinarians. The Veterinary Accreditation Issues Group determined that regular interactions with schools of veterinary medicine and with veterinary licensing boards are necessary to maintain standards of education and to assure continuing standards of ethical conduct. The Core Orientation required for veterinary accreditation is insufficient to prepare veterinarians for this role. Tasks are required of the accredited veterinarian for whom training must be provided at the veterinary college level. For example, one Task, the ability to provide clinical examinations and diagnose foreign and program diseases, would only require expansion of the regular clinical medicine and pathology education to produce a mindset of the veterinary practitioner that a foreign animal disease (FAD) may occur in the US. This would help assure that FADs are considered in the final diagnosis. Only through communication and interaction in the educational process can we assure that it is adequately addressing these needs. State licensing boards have different structures and perform different professional

support roles depending on the State. Licensing information must be obtained regularly from licensing boards to assure that veterinarians listed as "Active" on the Veterinary Accreditation System Database (VAS) are currently licensed to practice veterinary medicine.

The resources necessary for two-way electronic mail and for regular dissemination of information to accredited veterinarians include sufficiently trained personnel at the Area and National levels. They must be able to keep databases up-to-date and to perform the technical services required. The data base must be able to facilitate customized mailings to groups of accredited veterinarians. These communications may be e-mail or fax messages. Examples include emerging diseases of concern to large animal practitioners, new requirements for entry of horses into Canada, new disinfectants effective against diseases of interest, opportunities for qualified accredited veterinarians to be detailed to foreign countries to assist in control and eradication of disease, and other mission-critical issues for Veterinary Services and animal health. Training must be readily available for data entry personnel to maintain proficiency.

A personal relationship must be established between accredited veterinarians, particularly those in Category II of the proposed Veterinary Accreditation Program, and Federal and State Veterinary Medical Officers (VMO) in the states where they practice. Some states are performing this function already and strongly encourage it as a way to develop good 2-way communication so important in emergency disease response. In most states, this activity will require coordination between State and Federal animal health offices and sometimes increased person-power in the states to cover the communication and resulting enhanced disease eradication and control activities. Ideally, all newly-accredited veterinarians will receive a visit by a VMO for delivery of certificates of accreditation at which time any questions about their role as an accreditation veterinarian can be answered.

PROPOSED ACTIONS:
- Support the Veterinary Services Portal System and provide regular feedback, as appropriate, during its development to assure that the communication needs of the Veterinary Accreditation Program are addressed.
- Provide an additional Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) position in each of the Regional Offices to be dedicated to the National Veterinary Accreditation Program. These VMOs would help coordinate training activities and resolve accreditation violation cases in their Region. They would assure that new Program requirements and all Safeguarding issues are being addressed across all Area Offices. The future ongoing training and education requirements of the new program may also require the addition of NVAP personnel to work with Professional Development Staff on these resources.
- Provide additional VMOs as needed in the Area Offices to allow personal communication and program participation to reach accredited veterinarians and enhance their personal interaction with the Area Offices.
- Disseminate information about changes in the Veterinary Accreditation Program to reach all groups and individuals impacted by the changes.
- Provide updated Veterinary Accreditation Guide to Practitioners to accredited veterinarians electronically.

- Develop internet and VAS communication capabilities to interact regularly and smoothly with accredited veterinarians, state licensing boards, universities, APHIS subunits, and the Agency.
- Provide communication resource information, to include available software systems and how to access them, to accredited veterinarians to overcome any technical deficiencies and encourage electronic sharing of information.
- Interact with schools of veterinary medicine regarding their education applicable to preparation of accredited veterinarians.
- Interact with State Veterinary Licensing Boards to develop a system that will provide regular updates of veterinary licensing information to all state Area Offices.
- Develop communications systems with accredited veterinarians to provide information flow on international animal health events.

Implementation Plan:

Tasks:
- Immediately identify resources available for facilitating communications with accredited veterinarians, colleges of veterinary medicine, state licensing boards, and other interest groups. Provide timely reports to these groups, alerting them to the impending changes in the Veterinary Accreditation Program. Reports will include a VS contact for each Area Office that will be available to receive feedback about program changes and answer questions.
- Immediately provide VMOs in the Regional Office to Coordinate the Veterinary Accreditation activities in the Areas and to help assure that safeguarding recommendations are addressed.
- By January 1, 2005, through the Regional Office Coordinator, assess the needs of the Area Offices for additional VMO positions to cover communication, education, and compliance needs of the new NVAP.
- By June 1, 2005, each VS Area Office, in states having colleges of veterinary medicine, will have developed a liaison with that veterinary college. The liaison will serve as the college representative who will work with VS to adequately cover the Tasks and Objectives of the Veterinary Accreditation Program.
- By March 2005, develop and distribute to accredited veterinarians a communications package about the new Veterinary Accreditation Program, to include available continuing education modules. Use database-generated communication methods when possible.
- On an ongoing basis, Federal animal health offices will communicate regularly with Accredited Veterinarians through outreach of the field veterinarians, participation in professional organizations, participation in common programs, provision of a regular newsletter with animal health and program information, and support of veterinary education at the veterinary colleges.   State offices will be encouraged to do the same. Collaboration of Federal and State offices in production of an animal health newsletter is also encouraged as a way to develop teamwork among Federal and State officials and accredited veterinarians.

Accountable Individuals/Groups: National Veterinary Accreditation Programs Staff, Area Veterinarians in Charge , VS Regional Offices, Professional Development Staff
Other key players: Colleges of veterinary medicine, state licensing boards
Resources needed: (See estimates in attached 8-75)

- Support for printed and website communication and information through Professional Development Staff and other sources
- Acquisition of additional field VMOs in order to cover need for increased communications at Area level
- Acquisition of additional Regional VMOs to oversee Area Veterinary Accreditation Programs for compliance with the new program standards, for attention to Safeguarding directives, and to assure that Program resource needs are met
- Information Technology resources for state of the art communications systems and methods to enhance interactions
- Educated and updated clerical personnel at Area and Staff levels to perform data entry and retrieval necessary for maintenance of good communications resources.

Statutory/regulatory impacts: None
Political sensitivities: Information communicated to Federal or State veterinarians by Accredited Veterinarians may relate to reportable animal diseases that may impact on the economics of the animal industries through resulting restrictions on trade. All such reports must be kept confidential until screened and investigated and until it is released through official channels.

Accredited veterinarians will be interested in receiving state-specific animal health information in transmissions of information from the Veterinary Accreditation System. This may require formal agreements between State and Federal officials regarding what can and cannot be disseminated. There may be a need for Area Offices to customize the information transmitted to their accredited veterinarians to accommodate their State counterparts.
Sequencing: Success of communications depends on information technology services and resources.

Partnering/Cooperation/Communication:

- Improvements in communication will favorably impact on relationship with veterinary practitioners and colleges of veterinary medicine.
- Improvements in communication will result in better exchange of information necessary for safeguarding our nation's animal agriculture.

Expected Outcomes and Performance Indicators :

- Increased number of reports of suspected emergency animal diseases
- Better attendance of State/Federal Emergency Planning meetings
- Fewer violations of veterinary accreditation regulations
- Enhanced interpersonal relations between accredited veterinarians and Federal workforce.

Linkage to the VS Strategic Plan:

Objective 1.3: Improves readiness to respond to disease incursions
- Animal health alerts through Veterinary accreditation website and messages sent through communications system will ready accredited veterinarian for response action

Objective 3.1: Respond effectively to adverse animal health events and continue to improve the national animal health response capabilities
- Veterinary accreditation communications resources facilitate rapid interactions between accredited veterinarians and Federal Offices
- VS ability to more readily provide information about current animal disease alerts increases opportunities for disease reporting by accredited veterinarians

Objective 3.4: Reduce the incidence and spread of serious animal diseases including those with public health/food safety implications
- Communications resources facilitate interactions between accredited veterinarians and Federal offices for better management of diseases that occur
- VS ability to provide current alerts to accredited veterinarians about zoonotic disease threats and food safety incidences will result in better protection and increased reporting

Objective 4.1: Improve market access and promote timely and efficient certification for exports of U.S. animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics
- Use of Veterinary Accreditation System communications for dissemination of information important to accredited veterinarians improves their ability to assist producers in successfully marketing animals and products
- Enhanced communications provide more ready assistance of Area Offices to accredited veterinarians when errors occur with their preparation of health certificates

Objective 5.2: Improve internal and external communication in order to increase awareness and enhance cooperation and coordination
- External communication with accredited veterinarians will be enhanced with planned improvements to the National Veterinary Accreditation Program
- Enhanced communications resources will also be experienced at the Area, regional, and national levels, improving internal transfer of information

Objective 5.3: Utilize information technology effectively
- Accredited veterinarians will benefit through VS information technology tools to include e permits, the GIS system for reporting of animal disease locations, the GDB for reporting of animal disease statistics of interest and through new communications systems specially produced for the Accreditation Program.